

## INSANITY.

Rapid Increase of Mental Disorders Here and Abroad.

## THE APPARENT CAUSES.

Opinions and Reports of Experts on the Spread of Lunacy.

Within the past few years the steady increase in the number of commitments to hospitals and asylums for mental diseases has attracted general attention. An examination of the yearly reports of the principal asylums of the country shows that during the past five years or more there has been a pretty regular increase in the ratio of insane persons to the population, and, as stated in the report for 1877 of the Willard Asylum for the Insane, "that the increase is out of proportion to that of population, and seems to be confined to the dependent and middling classes."

In England and Wales the ratio of insane to the population is 1 to 373; in Massachusetts, 1 to 423; New York, 1 to 587; Illinois, 1 to 866, and Iowa, 1 to 1,011. Thus shows that the density of population has a more or less predisposing effect, producing, as it is believed, a deteriorating influence on the human race, morally and physically. The increase in the number of insane in the State of New York for the past quarter of a century is over one hundred per cent, and, according to experts in mental diseases, this increase is not confined to any particular section of the State, but is more or less general. If the different counties are examined the ratio of insane to every thousand of the population would be as follows:—Ontario, 26; New York, 25; Suffolk, 25; Schuyler, 22; Albany, 22; Cattaraugus, 21; Dutchess, 21, and so on down the state, Hammon and Rockland counties having the lowest ratio, being only 6.

## CAUSES OF MENTAL DISEASE.

No one has been a constant reader of the daily papers for the past few years can fail to have been impressed with the great increase in the reports of suicides, homicides and the commitments of alleged maniacs to the different city and county asylums.

While much of this is directly due to the rapid increase of the population of New York and neighboring cities there must be other causes for the disastrous increase at work. Increase of population brings with it overcrowding, disease-producing surroundings, bad sanitary arrangements, which, by lowering the tone of the people, boil in a moral as well as a physical point of view, directly predisposes the very poor and middling classes to mental disease. Dr. Tuke, a well-known London scientist, has written a work under the title of "Insanity in Ancient and Modern Life." In this he elaborately investigates the causes of mental diseases in Great Britain, where the increase of lunatics has been enormously large during the past half century. After a careful examination of all the statistics, showing that the number of insane people confined in asylums in England and Scotland at the present time reaches 66,636, Dr. Tuke concludes that the principal causes of mental disease at the present time are—First, intoxication, including the action of alcohol and allied stimulants, not only in themselves, but also in their excess, but upon his or her offspring, whose weakness produces degeneracy in the succeeding generation; second, that defective nourishment, leading as it does to exhaustion and malnutrition of the nervous centres, causes degeneracy of the race, the evidence of which can be seen in the rapidly increasing population, especially among the rich, taken in conjunction with the want of good sanitary arrangements and overcrowding in filthy dwellings. Under the third class of causes he considers moral influences, "partly mixed in character, with those of physical origin, and partly, as a consequence of habit, domestic strife, misery, commercial speculations and losses, religious excitement, disappointments in love and general overwork. Under the fourth and last head is considered intellectual strain as a cause of insanity, which he holds to be the least frequent of all causes if examined alone.

An examination of the reports of the principal public asylums in this country, public and private, confirms to a very great extent the observations of Dr. Tuke made in England.

## INSANE WOMEN.

In the report of Dr. Parsons, the Medical Superintendent of the City Lunatic Asylum for Females, 1877, is given the following increase in the number of patients in the asylum during the past ten years:

The table is as follows:—

Year.	Number of Patients on December 31.	Percent. of Increase.
1867.	596	15.50
1868.	673	12.92
1869.	673	12.63
1870.	758	81
1871.	839	8.2
1872.	822	5.12
1873.	985	1.049
1874.	1,049	6.49
1875.	1,138	8.48
1876.	1,123	7.47
1877.	1,226	8.5
1878.	1,226	10.30

In reviewing this table Dr. Parsons says:—

"The annual increase in the number of female patients since the date of ten per cent during the next year, the result would be shown in the following table:—

Estimated number of female patients, December 31, 1870.

Estimated number of female patients, December 31, 1871.

Estimated number of female patients, December 31, 1872.

Estimated number of female patients, December 31, 1873.

Estimated number of female patients, December 31, 1874.

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